

SERMON: 2018/10/21 (22nd Sunday aft. Pentecost, Yr. B - Track 1) - *Job* 38:1-7, 34-41; *Psalms* 104:1-9, and, *Mark* 10:35-45_BTR

[Invite children to the front. Pile of dry sand in a tray?]

Have you ever tried to make a sandcastle?

[Wait for reply.]

Yes?!

Have you ever tried to make one without any water?

(With sand that is completely dry?)

What happened?

[Demonstrate that the sand just keeps falling apart (into a shapeless heap). It won't hold together as a (solid) structure.]

So, the sand, by itself, is missing something.

It needs a "glue" - a foreign substance, an "additive" - to hold it together; and this is like the universe - the world - that we live in: Like the dry sand, it is constantly trying to drift and fall apart into chaos and a flat, dispersed mess. [n.1] Everything that we build - houses, churches, art-galleries - is decaying and crumbling too.

And any structure that you see in Nature is doing the same: the nests that birds build, termite mounds, mole-hills, beavers' dams, bees' honeycomb, the tunnels that groundhogs dig... these intricate, beautiful structures are all falling apart - some so slowly that you cannot see it happening: it might take hundreds of years, *thousands*, but every structure - even our bodies - are slowly becoming dust, inert, nothingness.

What's needed, then, is something - *someone(!)* - to bind creation together; to be the "glue," so that there is something rather than nothing; to give life predictability and wonder.

And this, we see in our latest reading from *Job* is, *GOD!* [See: v.38-41.]

(And in our Psalm.) [104:5ff.]

God - His love - is keeping everything existent.

Our stuff; you and me - we are alive and real because God wants us to be.

And this thought should shape everything that we are and do.

I am here because God my creator chose for me to be here and He is keeping me even now: [Ps. 3:5; Heb. 1:3].

Let's pray: Father God, ???, in Jesus' name, amen.

[Ask children to leave.]

'James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to...[Jesus, their rabbi] And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left in your glory"'

So begins our passage from *Mark* today - with a power grab - for thrones in The Kingdom, which is to come.

And their request - and the response it elicits from our Savior - raises two topics for discussion this morning:

Firstly, there's the topic of to what extent our lives - our "fates" - are predetermined or, to borrow the gospel passage's term, 'prepared' for us: that's verses thirty-five to forty.

And then, from verse forty-two, Jesus outlines a model - the fundamentals - of *Christian* leadership.

Between the two is another sentence - bridging the sections - about the anger which the Apostles felt toward James and John for being concerned about their future, *heavenly* status. Anger which is passed over in silence by Christ, without comment, which is interesting in itself because...why?!

And - let's deal with this here and get the matter out of the way - it seems likely, to me, that He - Jesus - sympathised with the group's feeling about the inappropriateness of the question, and so let the brothers feel the *full* force of the opprobrium directed at them: without a doubt, He too thought that this issue was one that shouldn't concern His followers; it *isn't* about rewards and favour and prestige.

And those who chase (after) such things, poison the Church - and communities and nations.

Which is why He lets James and John "stew in their juices" - He wants them to feel embarrassed; to shift their feet awkwardly and to avoid His gaze.

"Yeah, that's right." He probably thought.

"Who feels stupid now?"

"Maybe next time you'll engage your brains before opening your mouths to stick your feet in."

"...Engage their brains" because, and forgetting for a moment His actual teachings - everything about Jesus - the way He dressed and lived, the people He spent His time with - lepers, fishermen, crazies - suggested that *here* was a man like no other, one uninterested in "glory" or fame or applause, promotions or "keys

to the city."

And, as such, He was a leader unlike any they knew.

You know, I heard a TED-talk on NPR the other night, and the speaker, whose topic was about how to improve American democracy, quoted the Sci-Fi author, Douglas Adams, who said: "The person who wants to be in charge is exactly the one you don't want to be so."

And I thought to myself: "Exactly right!"

And that was Jesus.

He didn't "wish" to be 'great' [v.42] because, as Mel Brooks' Louis of France in *A History of the World, Part I*, puts it, again and again: "It's good to be king."

Jesus did astonishing things - miracles, exorcisms, sacrificing Himself 'for the sins of the whole world'. [1 Jn. 2:2] - for the sake of everyone *but* Himself.

(He needed none of it being perfect and holy.)

And this is how we should lead, if we have the opportunity: "for the sake of others."

This is important too:

You might confuse His comments about 'the Gentiles' and rulers "lording" it over them as advocacy for radical egalitarianism; a verbal push for the flattening of every hierarchy and the removal of every law-giver, monarch or president.

But that would be a misinterpretation.

This is why Pontius Pilate - who wasn't an especially agreeable fellow - struggled to come to terms with why he should execute Jesus for the Jews: 'Why, what evil has He done?' he asked the Sadducees: [Mt. 27:23]. His interest, as the Roman governor, was only in that criminal activity which was overtly, directly political in nature - seditionists, insurrectionists, and such like. And there were men who challenged his authority: terrorists like the Zealots. But Jesus wasn't one. He had even, after all, encouraged the Apostles to pay their taxes to Caesar like everyone else.

The sign Pilate stuck on the Cross, therefore, 'King of the Jews', was a trumped up charge; a pretext - to make sense of a judicial farce.

But Jesus claims the title by right:

He wanted His friends and neighbors to see Him as a descendant of David - this is why Bethlehem is chosen as His birthplace and Joseph as His adoptive father. He desires that we call Him, "Lord."

It is, in fact, essential that we do. And embrace Him as such:

Discipleship is about unseating ourselves as the bosses of our lives, and inviting God to step in and take over, without argument or compromise.

And it is incumbent on us to do that if we want to see *His* kingdom someday. It is our duty; our responsibility.

It won't happen against our will, but only when we seek after it.
Which brings us to the other topic I said we'd consider - that of "determinism."
Some Christians do believe and teach that everything that happens does so because God *makes* it happen.

That He has ordained all things since time immemorial, and whatever will be will be.

But this isn't what we find in the Bible:

God *wills* everything, yes, as in He *permits* it - those things that do, in fact, occur. Nothing happens that He hasn't *allowed* to happen.

But this isn't to say that He *wants* every occurrence, and that every small detail is *planned* beforehand.

With this in mind, turn with me to your *Book(s) of Common Prayer* (in the pews) - to page 871.

Here, you will find the 'Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion', the foundational doctrinal document of our denomination - of Anglicanism; and what does it say at the top of page 871? [\[n.2\]](#)

Allow me to read it to you: 'Predestination to Life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby (before the foundations of the world were laid) he hath constantly decreed by his counsel secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour.'

'Chosen'.

"How?", you ask.

In what way?

But you already know the 'mechanism': [\[n.3\]](#) they are selected - *divided* [see e. g.: [Mt. 25:31-33](#)] - by whether they confess Christ crucified or not; [\[Rom. 10:9\]](#) by their faithfulness to Him. [\[2 Tim. 2:12\]](#)

Hence, last paragraph: '[W]e must receive God's promises...'

We. You and I.

It is, then, no mystery. [\[n.4\]](#)

We find it plainly explained in the New Testament:

'[W]hosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life' - and thus be "chosen." [\[Jn. 3:15. K. J. V.\]](#)

The only 'secret' is why He should have decided to make this possible at all!

This *is* the (unfathomable) mercy of God.

Let's take a moment to reflect (upon it).

Footnotes:

1. 'Every star will die, nearly all matter will decay, and eventually all that will be left is a sparse soup of particles and radiation. Even the energy of that soup will be sapped away over time by the expansion of the universe, leaving everything just a fraction of a degree above absolute zero. In this "Big Freeze", the universe ends up uniformly cold, dead and empty.' - Becker, Adam (2nd of June, 2015), 'How Will the Universe End, and Could Anything Survive?'; *BBC*, available at <http://www.bbc.com/earth/story/20150602-how-will-the-universe-end> (accessed October 17, 2018). I first heard about this chilling "Big Freeze" theory from professors Brian Cox and Wilkinson at a clergy conference in Liverpool in September 2016: https://twitter.com/rev_b_randall/status/773467878947450880
2. You can find them also here: http://anglicansonline.org/basics/thirty-nine_articles.html
3. I am borrowing this word from Bruce Ware. See: 'Prayer and the Sovereignty of God' (2010), in Storms, Sam & Taylor, Justin (Eds.), *For the Fame of God's Name: Essays in Honor of John Piper*, Wheaton, I. L.: Crossway, pp. 126-145.
4. This is contrary to the view of the popular preacher, John Piper, who, trying to explain why God decides who will be saved 'before creation (p.13), leaving them with no say in the matter, argues: '[H]is motivation is complex, and not every true element in it rises to the level of effective choice. In [H]is great and mysterious heart, there are kinds of longings and desires that are real[, then, such as that all 'perishing sinners' should enjoy salvation (p.48), and] - they tell us something true about [H]is character. Yet not all of these longings govern [H]is actions. [Rather,]He is governed by the depth of [H]is wisdom [as] expressed though a plan that no ordinary human deliberation would ever conceive (Rom. 11:33-36; 1 Cor. 2:9)'. (*Does God Desire All To Be Saved?* (2013), Wheaton, I. L.: Crossway, 49.)